

THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN RACE.¹

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LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—The custom which demands that your President address you at the time of the annual meeting—not when the Academy is in formal session, but when seated around the hospitable board—lays upon him a difficult duty. You expect from him the best that he can give in his science; and still what he gives should be appropriate to the hour, when in pleasant personal intercourse thoughts find expression as they arise, and the stimulated imagination carries us away to more daring flights than those we venture on when our thoughts are given to serious work. Permit me, therefore, to join in the imaginative mood and to lay aside the scruples and doubts of the study and to tell you how in my dreams the stones that we are shaping with arduous labor, and that may in time form a solid structure, but none of which is finished as yet, seem to fit together; and let me sketch before your eyes the airy picture of a history of the American race as it appears before me in dim outlines.

Man had arisen from his animal ancestors. His upright posture, his large brain, the beginnings of articulate and organized language and the use of tools marked the contrast between him and animals. Already a differentiation of human types had set in. From an unknown ancestral type, that may have been related to the Australoid type, two fundamentally distinct forms had developed—the Negroid type and the Mongoloid type. The former spread all around the Indian Ocean; the latter found his habitat in northern and central Asia, and also reached Europe and the New World. The uniformity of these types ceased with their wide spread over the continents, and the isolation of small communities. Bushmen, Negroes and Papuans mark some divergent developments of the one type; Americans, East Asiatics and Malays, some of the other. The development of varieties in each group showed similarities in all regions where the type occurred. The races located on both sides of the Pacific Ocean exhibited the tendency to loss of pigmentation of skin, eyes and hair; to a strong development of the nose, and to a reduction of the

¹ Address of the retiring President, read at the annual meeting of the Academy, 18 December, 1911.

size of the face. Thus types like the Europeans, the Ainu of Japan and some Indian tribes of the Pacific coast exhibit certain striking similarities in form. This tendency to parallel modification of the type indicates early relationship.

After these conditions had developed, one of the last ice ages set in. The members of the race that lived in America were cut off from their congeners in the Old World, and during a long period of isolation an independent development of types occurred. Still the time was not long enough to wipe out the family resemblance between the Asiatics and Americans, which persists up to this day; but numerous new lines of growth developed. The face assumed a distinct form, principally through the increase of size of the nose and of the cheek-bones. The wide spread of the race over the whole territory of the two Americas that was free of ice, and the isolation and small number of individuals in each community, gave rise to long-continued inbreeding, and, with it, to a sharp individualization of local types. This was emphasized by the subtle influences of natural and social environment. With the slow increase in numbers, these types came into contact; and through mixture and migration a new distribution of typical forms developed. Thus the American race came to represent the picture of a rather irregular distribution of distinct types and colors, spread over the whole continent. The color of the skin varied from light to almost chocolate brown; the form of the head, from rounded to elongated; the form of the face, from very wide to rather narrow; the color of the hair, from black to dark brown and even blond, its form from straight to wavy; the lips were on the whole moderately full; the nose varied from the eagle nose of the Mississippi Indian to the concave nose of some South Americans and northwest Americans. Notwithstanding the wider distribution of these types, each area presented a fairly homogeneous picture.

Gradually the great ice-cap retired. Communication between America and Asia became possible, while Europe was cut off by the wide expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. Man followed the ice-cap northward. Members of the American race crossed over to Asiatic soil and occupied parts of Siberia, where finally they came into contact with the Asiatic group, which had also spread northward with the retreat of the ice.

Even at this early time, when the tribes were small in number and weak, human migration was only halted by impassable barriers; and thus contact of members of one group with those of another was not rare, and was always accompanied by the exchange of inventions and other cultural possessions.

We must revert once more to the earlier period, when man first entered

our continent. The step from animal to man had long been made. Man brought with him a language, the use of fire, the art of making fire, the use of tools for breaking and cutting and his companionship with the dog. No other animal had yet become the associate of man. Whether he was acquainted with the bow and arrow, the lance and other more complex tools, is very doubtful.

What the languages of the earliest Americans may have been we cannot tell. There is no reason to believe that there was only one language, for the slow infiltration of scattered communities may have brought groups possessing entirely different forms of linguistic expression into the continent. Certain it is, that, when man began to increase in numbers, the number of languages spoken were legion. Complexity of form characterized all of them. Sprung from the same root, some became so much differentiated, that their genetic relationship can hardly be recognized. By mutual influences, the articulations of some were so changed as to agree with those of their neighbors. Forms of thought as expressed in one language influenced others, and thus heterogeneous elements were cast in similar forms. As the race increased in numbers, some tribes became more powerful than others, and in intertribal wars many communities were exterminated. With them died their languages and sometimes also their type, although it is likely that in most cases these persist in the descendants of captured women. Thus a gradual elimination of the older stocks occurred, which were replaced by newer dialects of a few groups in which, for this reason, genetic relationship can still easily be traced. Only in those regions where no tribe gained the ascendancy does the old multiplicity of stocks persist. Hence the confusion of languages in California, in many parts of Central and South America, and the comparative homogeneity on the Great Plains, on the plateau of Mexico, and in eastern South America. The diversity of sound and grammatical form which pertains to the old stocks is so great that it is hardly possible to find one feature that is common to the languages of America and that does not belong also to other continents. Certainly all the most prominent characteristics of many American languages are found to the same extent among the tribes of Siberia.

When the contact between Asia and America was re-established, the culture of the whole continent was very simple. Some new inventions had been added to the old stock; weapons had been perfected; the beginnings of decorative art had been laid, and the ideas of the race had advanced in many directions. At this period, the Central Americans made the important step from the gathering of roots, berries and grains to the permanent cultivation of plants near their homes. The development

of the cultivated Indian-corn-occurred. With it the food-supply of the people became more stable, and the population increased at a much more rapid rate than before. Other plants, like the bean, were taken into cultivation; and the more certain the food-supply, the more rapid became the increase in population. The process that began in the Old World with the cultivation of millet and other grains was paralleled here; and step by step the new art spread over new territories, until it had reached the area now occupied by the Argentine Republic in the south, and the Great Lakes in the north. Only the extreme south of South America and the extreme north and northwest of this continent remained outside of this zone, partly due to climatic reasons, partly due to their remote geographical position.

The cultivation of plants and the concurrent increase in population revolutionized the ethnological conditions of the continent; for, owing to their large numbers, the agricultural people also gained the ascendancy over others who did not conform to their habits and remained fewer in numbers.

About this time, perhaps even before the perfected cultivation of plants, a marvelous industrial development set in. Basketry, pottery and weaving were some of the important industries that originated in this period. It is not likely that their origin can be traced in the same way to one restricted area, as in the case of the cultivation of Indian corn, but the many beginnings were more or less moulded in one form, and cultural stimuli probably flowed in many different directions, giving rise to technical forms that, notwithstanding their great diversity, bear the impress of one continental development. Nothing shows this process of assimilation more impressively than the decorative art of the continent. Forms exuberantly developed in Mexico or western South America recur in simpler form in the United States and in the Argentine Republic—not identical, to be sure, but still betraying their family resemblance. The marginal people of the continent alone have learned nothing of these arts. Pottery reached neither the Pacific Northwest nor the extreme south of South America, and the art forms of the North Pacific coast and of the Arctic coast show no affiliation with those of the middle portions of the continent. These districts remained almost excluded from the general flow of American culture, as it developed in the agricultural areas of the middle parts of the two Americas. Here we may perhaps still find something similar to what existed in our continent before the period of rapid cultural advance set in.

The religious life of the race grew with its other cultural achievements. A strong ceremonialism pervaded the whole life and attained its

culminating point in the most complex and populous communities. The fundamental ideas were disseminated from tribe to tribe and found an echo wherever they reached. Thus from many distinct beginnings grew up a peculiar type of ritualism that preserves a similar character almost wherever it exists at all. The thinkers among all these tribes were moved by one fundamental set of ideas, and hence all developed on somewhat similar lines; but the harder the conditions of life, the less is the number of independent thinkers, and the diversity and individuality of tribal ritualism decrease, therefore, as the agricultural resources of the tribes dwindle. In the extreme Northwest and South, only weak traces of the modern middle American ceremonialism are to be found.

Thus presents itself to our minds the picture of American civilization developing in the favored middle parts of the continents and spreading by a continuous flowing to and fro of ideas and inventions which stimulated continued growth. In contrast to these, the marginal areas of the extreme South and of the North and Northwest remained in a more stable condition.

Neither history nor archæology nor ethnology allows us at present to follow this complex development in any detail. On the contrary, there seem to be yawning gaps between the various centers that sometimes seem as though they could not be bridged; and still the conviction grows stronger and stronger that this whole culture represents as much an inner unity as that of the Old World.

Somewhat aside from the general current stands eastern South America, which, although not uninfluenced by the stream of Western culture, followed in a halting way only, and in many respects went its own way. The isolation of the dense forests, the smallness of the tribes and their position aside from the great current of events that had their seat in the plateaus of the West may have contributed to this condition of affairs. Sufficient vigor, however, existed here to allow an energetic expansion northward, which built a cultural bridge between the Atlantic slopes of North and South America that brought about a certain degree of individualization of the East as compared to the West.

I will not follow the higher civilizations that were built up on the basis of the Western culture in Mexico, Yucatan and on the western plateaus of South America. When these civilizations arose, their foundations were probably those that I described before as pertaining to a large portion of middle America, extending from some parts of the United States well south into South America. On this basis, however, they built up a promising structure: they laid the foundation of the sciences, developed the art of writing, learned how to work precious metals and copper

and advanced in the arts of architecture and engineering. When the advent of the Spaniards cut short this growth, it had attained a stage that might easily have led to accelerated advances.

We must now turn to the northern marginal area, which did not take part to any considerable extent in the cultural work of the people of middle America. Notwithstanding this, the area was not isolated but received stimuli from another direction. The Old World lies near at hand, and from here flowed the sources of new cultural achievements.

As in the New World, the early growth of culture in Central America had stimulated the neighboring tribes, and as inventions and ideas had been carried to and fro, so it happened in the Old World. A constant exchange of cultural achievements may be observed from the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea to China and Japan. What wonder, then, if the waves of this movement struck the shores of our world where it is nearest Asia, not with a strong impact but as the last ripples of the spreading circle. The Siberians and Americans were closely affiliated before the introduction of domesticated animals gave a new character to Siberian life; and at this time the Asiatic house, bow, armor and Asiatic tales found their way to America and spread over the whole northwestern portion of the North American continent, reaching even the tribes of our Western prairies.

The Southern marginal area, the extreme south of South America and parts of Brazil present a different set of conditions—an isolation that is probably equalled in no other part of the world excepting, perhaps, Tasmania. Unfortunately, our knowledge of these regions is so imperfect that almost nothing can be said in regard to the type of culture of the tribes inhabiting this area. May I point out that here lies the most important problem for the investigation of the earliest ethnic history of the American Continent, because here alone may we hope to recover remains of the earliest types of American mental development? The investigation of this problem, of the ethnology of the Fuegians and Ghes tribes according to modern thorough methods, may therefore urgently be recommended to the Carnegie Institution, that furthers so many lines of research, or to other institutions that are devoted to the advancement of knowledge.

Here halts my fancy, which has taken me in rapid flight over thousands of years, over endless changes of types and peoples. I do not venture to speculate about the question of a cultural relation between the islands of Polynesia and South America; for the suggestions are too slight, and the improbability of relations seems at present too great.

We may, however, cast a glance at the forms that America presents when compared to the Old World. If our picture contains any truth, the independence of American achievements from Old World achievements stands out prominently. The industrial arts were discovered in two large areas independently—the Afro-Asiatic and the American. They spread over continents but remained separated until the period of European colonization. To a great extent, the discoveries made were analogous—basketry, weaving, pottery, work in metals, agriculture. The important step that the Asiatic or European hunter made to the domestication of animals had hardly begun in America, where the Peruvians had developed the use of the llama. Much less had the still more far-reaching discovery been made of agriculture with the help of animals and the invention of the wheel. The use of smelted iron for tools was not known. Important differences may also be traced in fundamental forms of social institutions, arts and religious beliefs. Thus some of the most important advances of the races of the Old World were not known in America, although in other respects the work of civilization had far advanced.

In concluding, I beg to remind you once more that the sketch that I have given, although based on the accumulation of observed data, must not be taken as more than a lightly woven fabric of hypothesis. At every step, there are lacunæ of our knowledge which our imagination may temporarily bridge to serve as a guide for further inquiries but which have to be filled by solid, careful work to reach results that will be acceptable before the forum of science.